

Jazz is a dynamic, universal language, says Norway-based Mozambican saxman Ivan Mazuze

The worldly saxophonist plays Ottawa's Mercury Lounge on Thursday and Toronto's Small World Music Centre on Saturday.



PETER HUM

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As keen as many are to call jazz the classical music of America, there are practitioners who push for a broader take, such as the Mozambique-raised, Norway-based saxophonist Ivan Mazuze.

Pursuing an international career that has seen him in recent months tour in Europe, Southern Africa and South America, Mazuze lands in Canada this week. With a Toronto-based rhythm section, he plays the Mercury Lounge in Ottawa Thursday, and then Toronto's Small World Music Centre on Friday.

Below, Mazuze discusses his jazz upbringing and his take on jazz as a global phenomenon.

Q: When did jazz enter into your life?

A: The first exposure I had to jazz music was through my father who at the time used to listen a lot to great American jazz musicians such as the Johnny Hodges album *Everybody Knows Johnny Hodges*. He had quite a number of other LPs, but this is the album that I kept going back to listen to again and again.

The other band that I remember enjoying was the South African band called African Jazz Pioneers and their album *Live at the Montreux Jazz Festival*. Through my Mozambican saxophone teacher's advice and guidance I started to intensively listen to Charlie Parker.

Q: What appealed to you about jazz music?

A: The freedom of expression, improvisation, communication.

Q: Tell me about the jazz scene in Mozambique?

A: The jazz scene in Mozambique is at a good, growing period. Young musicians and music students are exposed to some important international jazz artists through the music events and festivals that occur yearly. Not least the fact that the internet has somehow (had) a globalization effect — the general public and musicians have access to much more information.

Q: What were your musical studies like in your homeland?

I studied at the National Music School with classical music studies as the main approach. But in the curriculum there were, as well, other subjects and instruments within traditional Mozambican music. I started studying music when I was seven years old with piano as main instrument and woodwind instruments like flute, clarinet and saxophone as second instruments. I completed my intermediate studies in music at the age of 16.

Q: Who are some of your musical heroes?

A: Johnny Hodges, alto saxophonist, for his swinging phrase, controlled long vibrato and beautiful round and warm tone.

Zim Ngqawana, South African saxophonist and flutist/composer for his approach to jazz using South African traditional music, his fiery energetic live performances and lyricism. Zim was and still is one of my great musical inspirations. I met Zim for the first time in 1996 in Mozambique when he was on a tour. Since then, I had been meeting Zim for mentorship and guidance into music approach. Zim unfortunately passed some years ago.

Charlie Parker is the Mozart and Bach of saxophone. For his clear and focused tone, articulation, early fundamental bebop language, energetic playing, lyricism. Charlie Parker is the main reason I became a saxophonist.

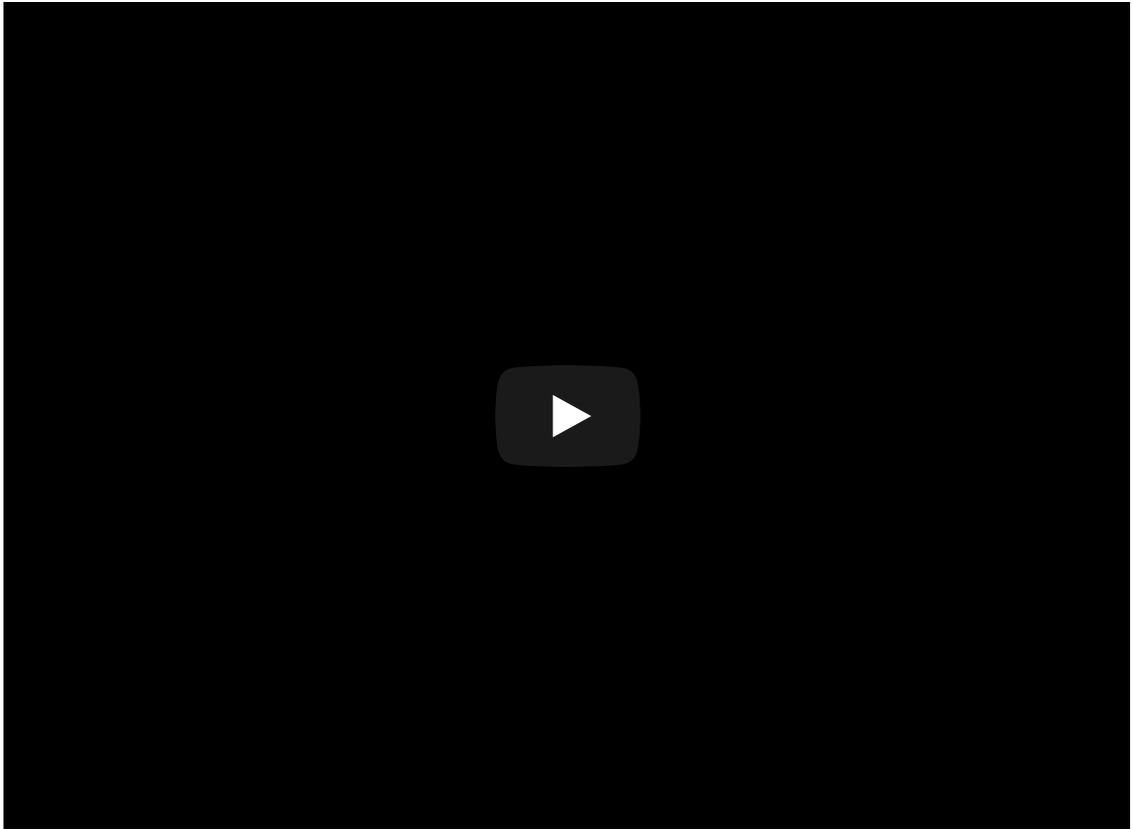
Joe Zawinul for taking African improvised music to a more definite contemporary format by using strongly fundamental, knowledgeable African musicians to express the style.

The list is endless. Many other musicians are my heroes. But one thing in common that I learn and seek from all these references is that we can talk the exact same language, but one can express and tell a story differently in a unique way. More important is to tell the stories of our identities as artists.

Q: You moved to Norway in 2009. What's it like to be an African expat musician there?

A: I moved to Norway with a mission to teach, which is an activity that I

still pursue. It feels welcoming to be an African expat in Norway, as with my contribution within my field, somehow Norway becomes more dynamic and culturally diverse. I have been performing and recording with some prominent musicians of Norway such as Per Mathisen, Jacob Young, Bjørn Vidar Solli and Bugge Wesseltoft, and African and Cuban-based artists in Norway such as Sidiki Camara, Raciél Torres, Busi Ncube and many more.





Q: Are there differences in how the music is played and appreciated in different countries?

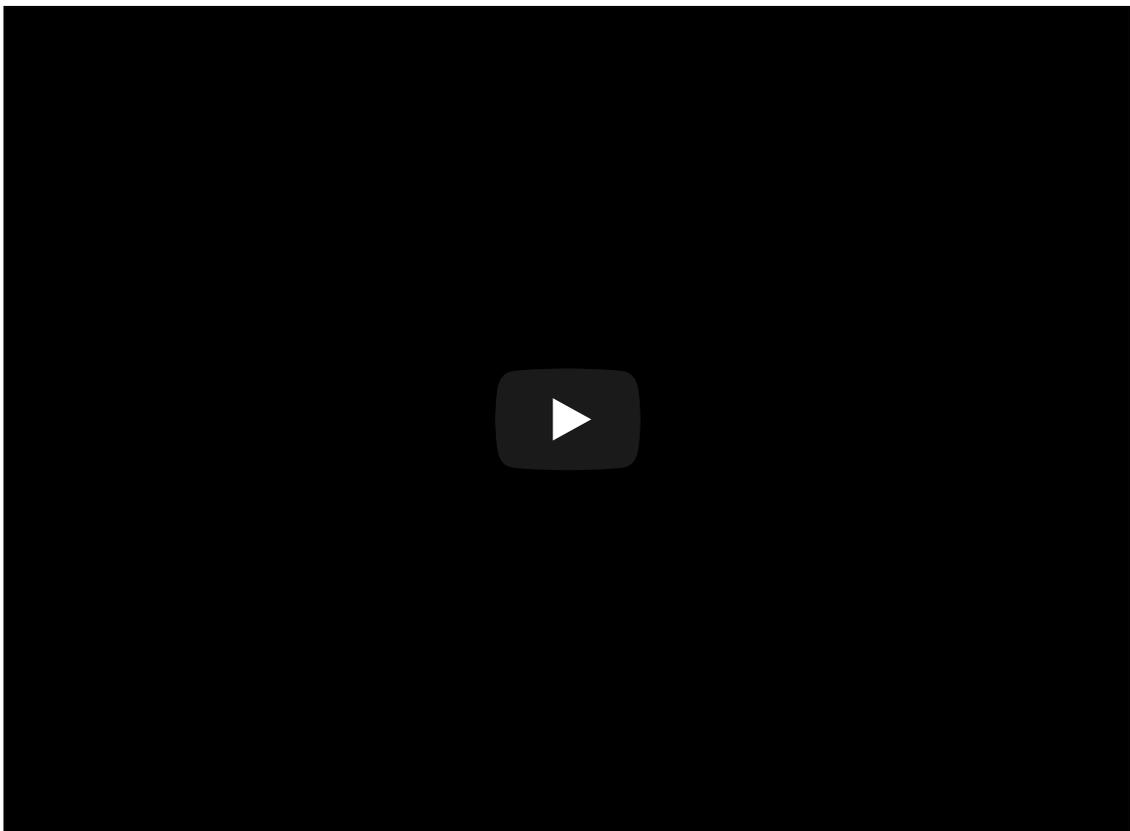
A: Yes, definitely. The audiences in African countries are often, in general, more expressive in terms of response and attendance, as there is a sense that the public wants to be part of the performance at the same time. In some parts of Europe, audiences are somehow much more reserved and somehow attentive to the art form being presented.

Q: What connections do you feel to the different strains of jazz around the world, from U.S. jazz to European jazz to African jazz?

A: One thing that makes jazz great is that it functions as a universal language and bond. More than ever jazz musicians seek to incorporate elements of their own traditions into jazz, which makes the genre dynamic and progressive.

Q: What is your concept of world jazz?

A: A landscape that moves between jazz and the African urban and traditional soundscapes.



Ivan Mazuze Quartet

with Marc Decho Nu-Trio opening

When: Thursday, Dec. 7, 8 p.m.

Where: Mercury Lounge, 56 Byward Market Square

Tickets: \$10 at eventbrite.ca (<http://eventbrite.ca>), \$15 at the door

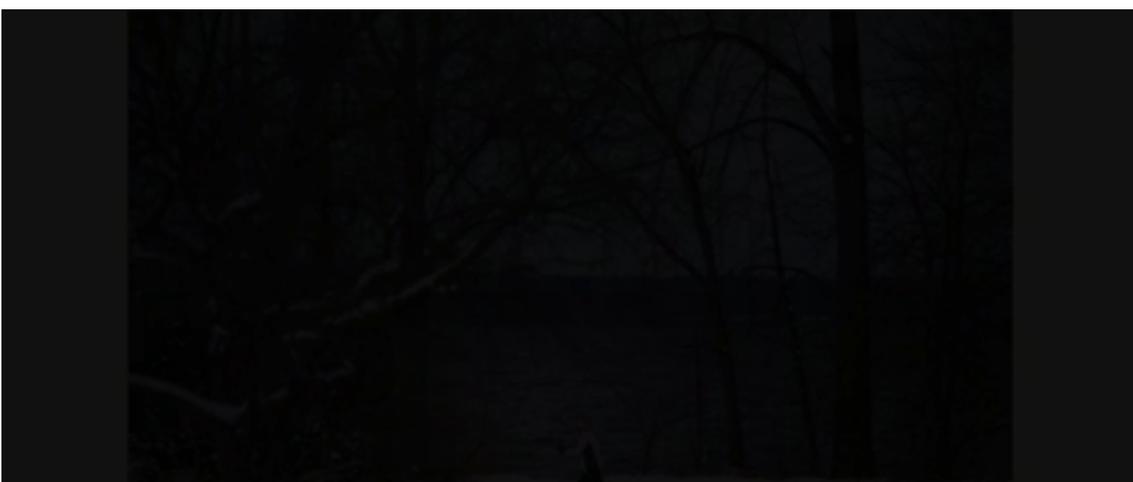
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Fabulous interview!

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Great interview! Quick correction: [Ivan Mazuze presents Ubuntu at Small World Music Centre](#) on Friday, which is tonight

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